THE THEATER IN NEW YORK

New Play by Sir Arthur W. Pinero Event of Paramount Importance—"Twelfth Night" at New Theater.

New York, Feb. 5.—Arthur W. Pinero's "Mid-Channel" is an example of the furthest advance in the dircetion pointed out first by Ibsen as the way to naturalism in dramatic artistry.

"Mid-Channel" has Ethel Barrymore for the wife of a churlish Englishman who nags her and bullyrags; and she, with none too sweet a temper to start with, lets it go sulky sour under his treatment. Fourteen years together have tired them of each other. An advisory friend tells them that, midway in one of the routes across the English Channel, boats are tossed roughly for several miles, but after passing that rough portion of the trip, they make the rest of the passage smoothly. That's his allegory to teach the pair forbearance. It doesn't, though, and they separate, the husband to mate transiently with a hussy and the wife with a libertine. They float like derelict wrecks through the remainder of the play.

Ethel Barrymore is the most fashionable actress in New York society, and her openings gather people who make a theater look like the Metropolitan Opera House. Her appearance in "Mid-Channel" was her first since, as Mrs. Colt, she became a mother. She had added twenty pounds to her beauty, plumping it to the limit of the Gibson type, but the buzz of comment within my hearing was that as a young matron she was quite as lovely as she had been when a supple maiden. Ethel's role was far heavier, too, than she had ever before undertaken; and it bore her from bickering with Charles Dalton as her husband to equally unaffinitive disagreement with Eric Maturin as her lover, despite the pacific efforts of H. Reeves Smith as the mutual friend; those three actors being helpers to her in need and indeed.

Ethel Barrymore in Serious Role.

The thought about Ethel Barrymore has been that, unduly petted, she let her amiable beauty save her from earnest effort; but that charge doesn't hold against her in "Mid-Channel." Pinero has written a bitterly graphic study of a petulant, irritated, unhappy, and finally sinful wife, and Ethel personates this creature of circumstances admirably. The audience seems glad to take her seriously.

In the third act, she goes from her lover to her husband repentant and expecting to be taken back; but he turns her away with contumely. In the fourth act, she returns to the lover to find that he has engaged to marry some one else.

Now, what shall become of this woman? Shall she live or die? Do you, like most people, like to have your fiction end happily any way? Or do you, like the few, prefer a miserable finish if that be logical? The three men hold a consultation over the woman's pitiful case. Shall the conclusion be life or death? Which would you rather? If there was some way to poll the audience instantly, a change of ten words would reconcile her and the husband at the pleasure of the majority. As Pinero has written it, a servant comes in to say that, overhearing the discussion of her plight, she has killed herself by leaping from a window.

"The Watcher" Is Spooky.

Two trails to success have been blazed through unbroken stage forests by pioneer American playwrights. One way is occult with telepathy, hypnotism, and all the other known kinds of abnormal mentality. That's the dramatic elevator going up. The other way is materialistic, commercial, and sordidly stingy with plays that can get along with short casts. It came to a drama enacted by four persons. Think of it. A really fine piece was taken all over the country with forty-eight actors—or about the number required in a well-equipped extravaganza—but divided into a dozen companies for a dozen separate routes.

The scheme of "The Watcher" is to go up high in the dramatic lift with much cult, and come down in it with little cost. The psychic weight is Spiritualism. The stingy lightness is a cast of six characters only. And they appear in a scene requiring no stage hands to make shifts. And a seventh important personage is kept off the pay roll. That seventh one, invisible and inaudible, becomes a spook. Cora Maynard, writer of "The Watcher," meant that creature to be potent, but impalpable. During the first act, she is a mentally shricken woman in an off-stage bedroom. Her daughter is so closely connected with her mentally that when she dies suddenly alone, the younger woman knows it telepathically.

There after the drama is haunted by the watchful spook; and there is a-plenty for this monitor to do. Her daughter-in-law used to be her daughter's fiance's mistress. The fiance is a millionaire wholly devoted to the good daughter, but his former sweetheart tells him he must get off with the new love and get on again with the old. The son is a drunkard, gambler, and blackleg, who grafts on his prospective brother-in-law yet hates him jealously on account of the vicious wife. The daughter, too, is made miserable by doubt of her really true lover. So the spook mother is a very busy watcher of a complex family affair. Pause to think it over.

A Strained Incident.

The most vivid incident in "The Watcher" is mundane, though, and calculated to make a mortal mother-in-law watch out. The fiance comes to call on the daughter. She is out. The son's wife is in. He won't touch her. She locks the door, drops the key inside her corsage, and defies him to get away without handling her. She turns passionate, and begs him to hug and kiss her hard; in point of fact, in her petition she specifies a hug that will "crush her in his arms," and a kiss that will "scorch her mouth.' And the actress is Catherine Countiss, temperamentally caloric. Yet Thurlow Bergen, the opposing acter, contrives to keep cool. Cathrine next blazes out vindictively. Her husband (he's the bad son, remember) comes home with the good daughter. They hear the voices behind the locked door. He breaks it down.

"You may as well know," says Catherine, "that I used to be this man's mistress, and am again."

Instantly the relations are strained all 'round, and very much. Surely, it is a crisis calling for the spook monitor to interfere. And so she does. Her daughter sees her and is comforted. Next she becomes visible to her son and he reforms instantly. The turn of the wicked wife comes next. She goes pop-eyed and gape-mouthed. Why shouldn't she? The boldest huzzy would be awed to limp penifence by the ghost of her mother-in-law. No third degree of inquisition could be more dreadful. She confesses her sins, exculpates Bergen and the play ends—with the pay of "the watcher" saved by not letting the audience see her.

To put the spook mother-in-law on view spectacularly might be worth a seventh salary and a second set of scenery; for the audience titters anyway at the most serious passages, and the risk of laughter outright at the apothesis of a ghostly mother-in-law austerely confronting her son's wicked wife might, like a desperate surgical operation, save the life of a stricken drama.

Max Rogers in New Comedy.

The new play this week for fun is "The Young Turk." The larger of the Rogers brothers was Gus, and he is dead. Max, the little fellow, who used to put his inquisitive nose up into the other's face and ask foolish questions like Weber with Fields, and take all the kicks and cuffs in the clownery, is called the Young Turk in the present show, although a New Yorker, because he is sworn into a secret order of revolutionists for Young Turkey. And now you know without another word, don't you? that he goes to Turkey for ludicrous adventures at court and in a harem. Max has not paired with a substitute for Gus in duets and dialogues. Instead, he is companionable with his wife, Maud Raymond, who was excluded from the company in Gus' lifetime through a family row, but who gets a-plenty of opportunity now. "How soon we are forgotten." The people laugh at Max alone as they did at him and Gus.

Novel uses of girls are looked for in shows like "The Young Turk." Between acts, they are transported from America to Turkey, and the curtain is lifted to show the broadside of a steamship, in the dark at night, with the face of a chorus singer illumined in each of the many portholes. Journeying on land they build a big automobile so quickly, out of pieces swished from their skirts, that they are seated in it before you have had time to wonder where it came from. Of course, they are ladies at the Sultan's court, and inevitably they are inmates of a harem, where they put off skirts; but the satin panties they put on are modest, although they loll sensuously as though to advertise the cigarettes they smoke. They pose there as listeners to Max's medley of popular ballads, in the Rogers manner, and join in the refrain of his New York topical ditty, "We Never Saw a Thing Like That in Turkey." Could the harem scene get along without a wriggle-waggle dance? It doesn't try to. But with nearly nude art women in high vogue, this hootchie-cootchie stunt looks innocent as kindergarten calisthenics. And a travesty of the current Parisian aoache waltz is too funny to be wicked.

Max Roger's mimic sweetheart and partner in song and dance is a new Violet MacMillan, adult in years, but only half grown in size, and so dainty a little creature that it looks nothing but neat and nice when Max takes a cud of chewing gum from her lips in a kiss. It is a theory that stage kisses don't cause jealousy, but a woman near me said, "I wonder if Mrs. Maud Raymond-Rogers likes that," as the gum swapped mouths. Well, it is art.

Revival of "Twelfth Night."

With "Twelfth Night" the New Theater Company has made its third classical revival, and thereby it has reaffirmed a peculiarity. In none of the three plays have the principal roles been as well played as we had seen them before; in each the subsidiary parts have been lifted to an unfamiliar prominence and effectuality. The reason is, of course, easy to find. Good actors can be had always for money; great actors are rare and hard to catch. We do not have to expect to see Malvollo and Viola as well played as by Henry Irving and Ellen Terry in order to be dissatisfied with Oswald Yorke and Annie Russell, whose performances are careful, intelligent, and competent—but no more. Usually such judgment upon a performance of "Twelfth Night" would mean damnation. But, in my opinion, anyway, that is not so at the New Theater. This band of actors is avowedly a stock company, and as such its first duty is to give a first-class, all-round performance. We are used to see "Twelfth Night" for the sake of a stellar Viola or Malvollo, or, at best, co-stars. As for the other roles, "the rest is silence."

No scene at the New Theater has gone off with such merriment as the midnight carousal of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, with the sympathetic Feste and Maria and the interrupting, outraged Malvollo. Louis Calvert and Ferdinand Gottschalk were the bibulous knights, Jacob Wendell the clown, and Jessie Busley the serving maid. I don't think I can better suggest to you the excellence of these four than just to tell a thought they brought to me. At Shakespeare one unconsciously finds oneself considering how So-and-so does or does not read that line or that speech well. This quartet gave me no idea of "reading" anything. They were talking, laughing, singing, but not "reading." They gave one no sense of "handling well" some speeches set down in a book 300 years ago. They might have been Willie Colliers and May Irwins rattling off the humor of the day. If any one thinks Elizabethan merriment a tradition rather than a fact, let him see Gottschalk, Calvert, Wendell, and Miss Busley.

Production Lacking in Atmosphere.

The oddity of seeing all-round performances of plays which we have come to look upon as star vehicles reminds us of—if it does not quite acquaint us with—no end of minor beauties. It is almost a surprise to find Viola's brother a mildly interesting, wholly flesh-and-blood character instead of a necessary evil, generally played by an incompetent amateur, who may or may not resemble the star actress. And who of us has not come to hall the approach of Antonio with determined patience for a boredom that must somehow be gone through? Yet here we find him to be a human, reasonable old man, who has his place in the structure of things, and plays it without holding up the action for intolerable periods.

What this latest "Twelfth Night" most lacks is the overhanging veil of romance. Annie Russell strives for it, but, charming and accomplished as she is, she has neither the presence or the voice for poetry. Besides, she fusses. Nor is she helped to romance. The Orsino, on the one hand, and the Olivia, on the other, are competent performances, yet both are of the earth. That vague veil that should hang between reality and romance—that did hang there when Henry Irving or Augustin Daly staged the play, and does when Julia Marlowe or Mrs. Patrick Campbell appears in it—is never there to etherialize the voices or to throw Maeterlinckian mists before the very positive, almost garish, colors of the scenery.

FRANKLIN FYLES.

RUTH ST. DENIS.

Hindoo Dances Are Considered Remarkable.

Miss Ruth St. Denis, the remarkable young woman whose Washington debut in her repertoire of Hindoo dances is soon to provide an artistic innovation and genuine novelty, is another example of the American girl who was obliged to make her way to success abroad before being able to gain recognition in her own country. Although born in New Jersey and having began a stage career while still in her teens, Miss St. Denis is much better known in London, Paris, Berlin, or Vienna, where she has been hailed as an aesthetic sensation for the past few years, than in New York, where she has just signaled her return to America by achieving a real triumph.

The story of Miss Denis' rise from obscurity to prominence as a foremost exponent of esateric dancing, is prhaps told best by the young woman herself, who said to a recent interviewer: "My father is an Englishman with an inventive turn of mind. I inherit from him the creative ability that I keep constantly employed in working out new dances. My mother is a New England woman, with a Puritan conscience and a Pagan love of beautiful things. Before I was out of my cradle she had taught me delsarte. I was always a dancer; it seemed natural for me to express all my emotions, all my impuses, in this art form. In New York I had associated with several members of the Hindoo colony there, acquiring many of their modes of thought and finding it possible to sympathize with their viewpoint in matters of art. Gradually the idea of "The Temple" dance with Radha, revealing the five senses, was evolved from my reading and study. I was first offered a trial performance in New York, and gave my dance for the first time before a Sunday evening audience at a Broadway vaudeville theater. Fortunately for me they grasped the meaning of my dances with unmistakable pleasure, and the result was offers of vaudeville engagements that would have kept me occupied for two years. The fear of becoming a mere mechanical dancer stayed me. Special matinees in New York led the way to European engagements. A season in La Scala Theater, in London, the approval of the German Emperor, who marked his appreciation of my performance by his gift of a diamond brooch; the enthusiastic applause of audiences in Berlin, Paris, Vienna, and Monte Carlo, and my recent American triumphs—these have followed, in course of time, that memorable Sunday night performance."

GUIDE SURPRISES DANCERS.

English Girls Fail to See Joke on Capitol Tour.

Miss Marjorie Graham and Miss Eva Fitzsimmons, two of the young English girl members of the Eight Palace Girls, at Chase's last week, are on their first visit to this country, and spent most of the time visiting the public buildings.

On the occasion of their visiting the Capitol, the guide learned of their greenness, and never lost a chance to provide amusement for the rest of the party that were sightseeing. While describing the statue of the Goddess of Liberty, the guide told them that up until a short time ago people used to be permitted to go up in the arm of the statue on the Capitol, but it had to be discontinued because they caught a boy biting off the finger nails of the Goddess of Liberty. And both the young ladies wondered why the rest of the party laughed.

"MADAM BUTTERFLY."

Geraldine Farrar to Sing Puccini Role at Lyric in Baltimore.

Miss Geraldine Farrar, the young American soprano, will sing the title role in Puccini's opera, "Madam Butterfly," at the Lyric Theater, in Baltimore, Friday night. This will be the twelfth performance of the Metropolitan Opera Company of New York in Baltimore this season, and will be Miss Farrar's second appearance there. Her singing in "La Tosca" in Baltimore some time ago attracted a large number of Washington operagoers to the Monumental City.

Including Miss Farrar, the three leading singers in "Madam Butterfly" will be the same as in "La Tosca." Antonio Scotti, the barytone whose singing and acting have attracted the attention of opera patrons wherever he has been heard, will be the Sharpless, American consul. The role of Lieut. Pinkerton, husband of Butterfly, will be sung by Riccardo Martin, the American tenor, whose rise in the operatic world has been rapid since he became connected with the Metropolitan.

A YOUTHFUL ACTRESS.

Imogen Fairchild, the Talented Daughter of Manager Taylor.

Imogen Fairchild—a striking name for display on a theatrical poster—may yet be emblazoned on the dead walls throughout this country if early experiences and training indicate future possibilities. The bearer of this name—the surname assumed for stage purposes—is the beautiful and talented young daughter of Manager L. Stoddard Taylor, of the Belasco Theater.

On Tuesday afternoon at the Belasco Theater Miss Imogen will interpret the leading role, Prince Felix, in the fairy play "Cinderella," to be produced under the direction of Miss Minnie Hawke, her most ambitious stage offering, for the benefit of the National Homeopathic Hospital.

Though only twelve years of age, Miss Fairchild has played many parts, and has been associated with such distinguished stars as Odette Tyler, playing Prince Charles de Bourbon in her production of "The Red Carnation." She also appeared in the support of the great Mme. Sarah Bernhardt, playing Georgie in "Frou-Frou." For several seasons she has appeared for brief engagements with Mr. Ben Greet, being one of the players who presented "King Midas" before President Roosevelt on the White House grounds. Other appearances were in Miss Hawke's productions of "The Sleeping Beauty" and "Jack the Giant Killer."

It is Miss Hawke who has been responsible for bringing out the latent talents of this gifted young actress, a training which included not only the dainty and finished dancing customary with Miss Hawke's pupils, but a special course in stage deportment and dramatic schooling.

Marguerite Clark's success in "The Wishing Ring," the Owen Davis comedy, which she gave at a special matinee performance in New York, was of such a nature that the Shuberts are considering reviving the piece. Miss Clark is still appearing in "King of Cadonia." It is after the run of the latter that she may play Broadway with "The Wishing Ring."

"Going Some," the Paul Armstrong-Rex Beach comedy, is to be novelized. Harper Brothers have undertaken the commission. Two road companies are now presenting the play.